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TACHI YOKUTS MUSIC

James Hatch

The bulk of the music to which this paper is devoted was recorded at three different dates by different observers. The first recordings were made by Professor A. L. Kroeber before 1904 on gramophone cylinders at the Lemoore Santa Rosa Yokuts reservation. The second series was made by a schoolteacher, Mrs. Margaret Cummin of Hanford, on disks at Hanford in the summer of 1940. The last and largest series was made by the writer in the latter part of 1957, also at Lemoore.

A number of points were to be covered in the selection of this particular group for study. First, the cylinder recordings which Professor Kroeber made in 1903 were Tachi rather than any of a number of other Yokuts groups. This added another dimension to the comparison of the stylistic features of the Yokuts music to the rest of California Indian music. The point was to find out if the music of this San Joaquin Valley group was stylistically more akin to that of northern California groups, such as the tribes of the Sacramento River Valley or to, say, that of coastal groups. Two contrasting styles were used for comparison, primarily because of their distinctive qualities and also because of their relative proximity.

The other main point concerned the writing of the music. A number of writers have referred to the possibility that variation in music might be structured, or rather, that there is an implicit "direction" to music and that variations can be plotted in a scheme similar to phonetics. That is, in any given musical pattern one might have a certain amount of variability and that variability might or might not be significant to the native. This proposition is almost self-evident; different singers can vary the features of any popular song so that the song will be either "better", "worse" or just "different". The changes which are not recognized as changes are also significant here. The problem is whether or not selection can be rigorous and still not alter the basic framework of the music.

The Tachi Yokuts were distributed over an area roughly north of Tulare Lake west to the Mount Diablo section of the coast range. They were a large and warlike group, possibly reaching a population of 500. The Yokuts language is classified with Miwok, Maidu, Wintun, and Costanoan as part of the Penutian superstock. Further ethnographic material on the Yokuts can be found in Kroeber (1907) and Gayton (1948).

The remnants of the Tachi spend a large part of the year on the Santa Rosa reservation near Lemoore. The number of families is constantly fluctuating and the population ranges from two or three dozen families to only two or three, depending upon the season. The housing consists of about three dozen shacks in extremely poor repair. The reservation is located on an alkali flat unsuitable for either agriculture or animal husbandry. The Tachis work at a variety of jobs. No one from the reservation has been known

105 to graduate from high school, nor have any of the Indians become tradesmen
or artisans. The primary source of income for the group is wages derived
[166] from farm labor. This is one of the reasons for the fluctuating population;
frequent trips from Lemoore in search of work take families away for days
[648] or weeks. Frequent visits from other Indians also added to the picture of a
constantly shifting population. Working as farm laborers has thrown the
Tachis in with Mexicans, as well as with other groups of Indians, and
genealogies have become very complicated.

115 The singers were all older people with the exception of Clarence
533 Atwell, who was about thirty years old when the 1940 recordings were made.
756 He was certainly the most energetic and outstanding singer recorded. He
had been a practicing doctor for a year before his death in 1940.

Leon Manuel was about 70 years old when the 1957 recordings were made. He was still active and, since he received a pension from the government, had a good deal of time to devote to making clapsticks and other paraphernalia. He knew a great number of songs and was a good singer, but
[354] he was not a doctor. Manuel was in good standing with the Tachis because of his pension and because he knew some of the "old-time songs" and ways. The importance of knowing traditional songs here is somewhat analogous to the attitudes in the Peyote cults among the Washo:

> The most admired singers are the most influential Peyotists and the degree to which the Peyotist has found "the Way" through the "medicine" is demonstrated by his competence with the song, drum, and rattle...A large repertoire of songs is also the measure of the man. One who has been able to "catch" many songs is not doubt "living a good life, and the medicine is backing him." (Merriam and d'Azevedo, 1957. 618:19.)

I make the analogy here between the Tachi and the Washo because doctors have had to be good singers, both at the present time and in the past. This is not unusual in California; in general, it is necessary to know a large number of songs and to be able to sing them well in order to be a doctor in many areas of the state.

115 Josie Atwell, the mother of Clarence Atwell, came to the Tachi community
533 from Sanger, where there is a Wechihit Yokuts group. She was recorded in 1940 and again in 1957, and was in her eighties at the latter session.

Professor Kroeber's recordings of 1903 were made of a singer named Salt Lake Pete. Although the stories which he told are still known and remembered, not a single one of his songs is known today, neither the

melodies nor the words. This suggests that most of the later recordings were of songs which were made up or received subsequent to the 1903 recordings. There was a very close correspondence between the 1940 and the 1957 recordings, perhaps largely because Josie Atwell was present at both sessions. 115 533

The problem of how fast music is made up and forgotten is different in different groups is a complicated one, contingent upon attitudes toward music and other features of culture. There has recently been a development in California Indian music which roughly parallels southeastern United States ballad singing. In both areas singers are becoming self-conscious about the music, and there is a great deal of eclecticism and virtuosity in the performance of the songs. A few Indians, usually doctors, make a deliberate effort to learn "old-time songs" and try to identify with traditional Indian cultures. As to why there was no correspondence between the 1903 recordings and the 1940 recordings, Professor Kroeber has suggested that the songs may have been brought in from outside the Tachi area. Indeed, many are in dialects other than that of Tachi. 182 533 [177]

The songs are sung in a relaxed non-pulsating style, preferably with a clapstick accompaniment. Although cocoon rattles are known and have been used in the Yokuts area, they are no longer employed. The feeling is that the latter are supposed to be used by doctors and, since there are no doctors indigenous to the Tachi community, they are not used. The clapsticks are clapped with the syllabic or rhythmic beat of the song, except with one group of songs which required an almost independent accompaniment. The Handgame Song #3, the Tulare Lake Song, and the Deer Songs were included in this group. It should be indicated, however, that the Deer Song represents something very unusual melodically and rhythmically in this area. The foralessness of the melody and the indecisiveness of they rhythm place this song in a separate category. 533 534 [156]

Helen Roberts (1936) mentions that the clapstick accompaniment of the Yokuts was completely independent of the rhythm of the songs. With the exception of the three examples mentioned above this is not now the case in the Tachi area. The accompaniment corresponded closely to the beat or to a subdivision of the beat. Thus, if the beat was 4/4, the accompaniment might be 4/4, 2/4, or 1/4. The end of a line is marked by a rapid vibration of the clapsticks which gives the effect of a compression. There is, however, no break in the rhythm of the lyrics. (By "line" is meant a complete phrase with as many reiterations as are sung before the transition to a new phrase.) 533

Tulare Lake Song(1) [539]

1. a wa ten may a wa ten may paʔa seo

2. ke wey may xo ke we may xo paʔa seo(2)

The repetition pattern for this song as sung here, is 1,1,1,2,2,1,1,2,2, etc.

533 Therefore the compression occurs after the third repeat of the first phrase, after the second repeat of the second phrase, and so on.

533 462 Almost all the songs were sung by both males and females with no apparent difference or "parts" such as found on the northwest California coast. One of the exceptions to this statement is the single work song recorded -- the Acorn Grinding Song. This song was sung only by the women, who did the acorn grinding, while the males did not, or pretended not, to know it. It is true that the males know more songs than the women; no reason was given why the women could not sing them if they wanted to. The one example of harmony, which occurs in the Sopas Song, is certainly accidental.

533 The tempos ranged from andantino to vivace, from 69 beats to 138 beats per minute, with the bulk of the songs falling at the latter end of the scale. In some of the songs there was considerable rhythmic variation. This was for two reasons: the first was that some of the songs, like the Deer Song mentioned above, were supposed to be sung without a fixed beat. The second reason for variation stemmed from the fact that individual singers, when singing alone, could and would vary rhythm and melody much more than when the group sang together. The combination of the group's clapsticks and singing would carry the song to its conclusion with a minimum of discontinuity.

The spread of the melodic contour was rarely over eight or ten semitones, with the largest group falling between six and seven semitones. This is in contrast with the northwest California coast, where an octave and one-half are extremely common, especially in the Brush Dance and White Deerskin Dance Songs. This again contrasts with the limited spread which is found among [171] the Modoc, Shasta, Achomawi, and other north central and northeastern groups. Among these groups melodic spreads of three or four semitones are not uncommon, and there is one grass game song, recorded by Dr. Kroeber, characterized by a two semi-tone spread.

The scale was predominantly pentatonic, although the limited spread of some of the songs made it difficult to evaluate. Some, but not all, of the songs showed a definable rise. The rise in Tachi music can best be described as a low-pitch low-contrast section alternating with a rise of a fourth or a fifth and a descending lyrical passage back to the low-pitch low-contrast section. The Tawanic or Morning Song shows a rise beginning in the 5th measure, and again in the 18th. The Lizard Handgame Song #4 begins with a rise.

Another feature of the songs was the sparseness of lyrics. Most of the songs averaged no more than two or three phrases totaling 10-12 syllables. Common repetition patterns for lines were:

1,1,1,2,2,1,1,2,2; 1,1,1,2,2,2,1,1,2,2,3,1,1;

and so forth. The repetition of the Lizard Handgame Song showed some variation:

1,1,1,1,2,1,1,1,1,1,1,2,2,1,1,1,2,2,1,1,1,2,2,1,1,1,1,2.

Apparently the number of repetitions made depends upon the singer's disposition and the context of the song, while the order of phrases is fixed by convention. In Professor Kroeber's early transcriptions the bulk of the songs were a few to several syllables longer than the 1940 and 1957 recordings. While the earlier songs sometimes contained up to eight or ten phrases toteling as many as eighty syllables, there was not a single long song found in the latter recordings. The Rattlesnake Ceremony Songs from the adjacent Yaudanchi area were particularly long (Kroeber 1907: 363-75). 533

A correlate of the shortness of the songs is their highly allusive character. The personal power song of Dawis Sapagay is given in text. This song refers to a rather elaborate story of how Sapagay was given the power to heal sickness. Sapagay was a very well-known doctor throughout the Tachi area. 538

Dawis Sapagay's Song [539]

palawa na he palawa na he	"Where will I go in?"
he yeo okonaw palawa na he	"I will go in (at the place)
yo ke wey na yo ke wa ke wa	where green scum is on the pool."

The story is as follows:

Looking for a doctor who could teach his curing power, Sapagay went to the edge of Wood Lake to find the underwater entrance to the place where the doctor lived. He dove in (at the place where the green scum is), and came up in a cave in which he met the guardians of the doctor. There was a man-sized spider with voracious jaws, and, afterwards, a rattlesnake coiled ready to strike. Last, there was a puma and a bear who tore men to pieces. Sapagay used a kingsnake charm against the spider and the rattlesnake (kingsnakes eat spiders and rattlesnakes), while against the puma and the bear he used a weasel charm which made him small and agile. He thus passed them by. 539 756 [789] [825]

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756

At length he came to the end of the cave. It was a new and strange land which he had not seen before. After looking around, he came upon the doctor sitting steadfast as a stone and looking straight before him. After a time the doctor looked up and asked Sapagay, "What are you doing here? How did you get in? You must have some sort of power to get past my guardians." Sapagay told him of the charms he had used and the doctor approved of them. They were the right charms for the man who wanted doctor power.

Sapagay looked about and saw that there was no one around. He said, "This must be a very lonely place; there are no other people here." The doctor replied, "You don't seem to like it here; why did you come?" And he continued, "I will show you the people who live here." So he called, and a long line of deer came out of the black mountain to the west. Sapagay thought to himself, "These aren't real people, but just deer from the woods." But the deer came and formed a circle about him and lost their horns and hooves, and turned into beautiful girls dressed in string aprons, beads, and clamshell ornaments. The doctor then addressed the girls, "Now give him your songs that he may have doctor power among his people." And the girls taught Sapagay their songs so that he could use their secret power.

When Sapagay learned all that he could, he asked the doctor how he could get back to his people. The doctor told him that the guardians would be asleep when he returned through the tunnel. And then Sapagay returned to his people and became a famous doctor who was called to all parts of California to cure the sick. (3)

Other songs of this sort are the Wali Wali, the Rattlesnake Ceremony Song, and the Sopas Songs. When the informant was asked to sing the Sapagay Song he did so, and when he was asked about the meaning of the words, he told the entire story quoted in text here. The assumption was that the hearer of the song knew the story to begin with. Also it became apparent that there was no hard-and-fast distinction between the lyrics and the story behind the song. 533 538

There were songs which were fairly self-explanatory: the Handgame Song (#3) involves a bone hidden in one of the hands. The idea of the game is that one player will be singing the goading song while his opponent will try to guess which hand the bone is in. The Morning Song (#7) is simply a description of the morning star. The Rain Song (#8) is sung in the rain-making ceremony. The "thunder rock" (unuk) is partially covered with water by the shaman in order to produce mild rains. If the rock is covered with water, torrential rains will ensue. There were a fairly large number of hand-game songs, mostly similar in rhythm and melody to those which are given. There is certainly more variety and complexity in these than is found in grass-game songs among the Miwok and the more northerly tribes. It is unfortunate that there was not more time to devote to getting the meaning of the words, especially since there is a group of songs in which allusion figures so importantly.

General Considerations

One of the most significant changes in Tachi and Central Valley music in general is related to the roles played by the Indians in the economy of the state. As most of them obtain a large percentage of their income from employment as farm labor, there is a good deal of contact with other Indians, and the picture at the Lemoore reservation is one of a constantly shifting and mobile population. One of the effects of this condition is the exchange of songs. The Tachis sang songs which were identified as Choynimni and Wechihit Yokuts and Mono and Squaw Valley in origin. The Tulare Lake Song (#1) and the Handgame Song (#6) are certainly Yokuts songs, but are not in Tachi dialect. Many of the songs have no English gloss because only a part of the song was understood by the singer. Songs composed entirely of nonsense syllables are absent among the Tachi, and probably in the entire Yokuts area. It should be said that the borrowing of songs is not confined to the San Joaquin Valley in California nor is it a new thing, although it is certain that the tempo of exchange has increased. A sitting-down song sung by a Pomo informant is included; this song is almost identical with a song sung by a Southern Sierra Miwok Indian from near Yosemite a year after the Pomo version was collected. Since the Miwok had died before this writer could get a gloss for the song, it was unknown whether the song was Miwok or Pomo. 533 177 178

With the exchange of songs between people of dissimilar linguistic affiliations it would seem that nonsense syllable songs would be very common. This is not the case with the Tachis in that at least partial, and occasionally incorrect, meanings are known for all the songs. It seems probable that

[177] [178] 533 songs identified by the Indians as "Mono" and "Squaw" Valley" are actually from distant Yokuts groups. The partial understanding of the lyrics argues for this, while Shoshonean or Athabascan songs would not be understood at all.

[171] Tachi music is distinctive in California in a number of ways. Whereas the Hupa, Karok, and Yurok groups feature a quite wide melodic spread, the Tachi seldom have more than an octave. This characteristic is again in contrast with the extremely restricted spreads which occur in northeastern California. There is no syncopation in Tachi or northeastern music, but it does occur in the northwest California groups.

[179] Another feature is connected with the relative length of time the Yokuts and other groups have been in contact with European culture. None of the ceremonies which were performed in the earlier days are still performed in the Tachi area. The music has been dissociated from the ceremonies. However, in the northwest groups the White Deerskin Dance, as well as a number of the other rituals, are still performed with the appropriate songs.

[171] All of the Tachi songs recorded showed a strongly syllabic character. This was true of the 1903, the 1940, and the 1957 recordings. It is also the case with the northeastern California, but not with the northwestern California music. Syllables such as pa, ta, wa, na, and ka are extremely common and are used in many cases as nonsense syllables to fill out the lines.

The variation which occurred was quite extensive, vowels in particular showing much more variation than occurs in speech. Since the two-line song predominated, it is difficult to make any statement about the variation in the order of line repetition. Melodic variation was frequent but showed no significant direction. This is not surprising if we remember that the Tachi music is only changing by being forgotten. There has to be some consensus on the desirability or undesirability of variation in order to give direction to a musical tradition.

NOTES

(1) Sung by Josie Atwell and Sadie Barrios. See Song #2. [115]

(2) In the transcriptions of the song texts I have followed Professor Kroeber's orthography whenever possible. The Yachi vowels are quite complicated phonetically and in the songs there appears to be a greater amount of free variation than exists in speech. For instance, a high-front vowel is in free variation with a middle front vowel in one of the songs, while these are phonemically different elsewhere. The English glosses for the songs were obtained from informants whose English was sometimes faulty, and they should therefore not be considered as definitive. 114 126 104 [115]

ɐ= lower-mid-front unrounded vowel
ö higher-mid-rounded front vowel
ə higher-mid unrounded back vowel

There are, in addition, the high and lower-high front unrounded vowels i and I, and the lower-mid back rounded vowel which is written "aw" and, last, the lower-mid unrounded back vowel which occurs in "cut". Typewritten "ʔ" indicates a glottal stop.

(3) The song and the story were given by Leon Manuel who is Sapagay's grandson. Sapagay is mentioned in Gayton's ethnography of the Yokuts on page 35. [115]

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